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### Corruption of Soviet Militia

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1. The most hated feature of the Soviet Regime in the USSR is undoubtedly the MVD Militia. The militia is the executive organ of the Ministry of the Interior. It is responsible primarily for public order and law enforcement. I believe that the militia personifies to the Soviet people the ruthlessness of the Soviet Regime, a typical "police state," with all its dread and sinister characteristics.
2. Although militiamen in Soviet Russia wear military uniforms, they do not belong to the military which, in general, is looked upon favorably by the population. The militia is staffed by a gang of ruffians, mercenaries, and extortioners, empowered by the state to exercise control over the population and to suppress brutally any kind of criticism or individualist tendencies. The Soviet militiaman took the place of the former ill-famed "gorodovoy" (urban policeman). The worst gorodovoy of the old regime, however, was an innocent lamb compared with the present militiaman. "Derzhimorda" and "Chameleon," types created by Gogol and Chekov, became by-words in the Russian language as grotesque incarnations of the former Tsarist state; yet they are pale and unimpressive figures compared with the average modern militiaman.

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3. As militia detachments are numerous and strong, one would expect perfect order to reign in the USSR. This is far from being the case. In my opinion Soviet society is rotten from top to bottom. Misappropriations and pilferage are a daily routine in all walks of Soviet life. Plant or agency directors, chief engineers, Jesk chiefs, shop supervisors, foremen, minor employees and menial workers, all are guilty of embezzlement and open stealing. In the USSR everything is owned by the state; that is, by nobody. The popular slogan is: "If I don't take it, somebody else will." Bribery, extortion and blackmail are common practices of state authorities in the USSR. It is obvious that the Ministry of the Interior is the agency which should correct this situation. But what hope of improvement is there when the police, the law enforcement branch of the government, are not only the worst offenders, but the instigators of these criminal practices which have become the hallmark of the Soviet state?
4. All over the USSR the militia is despised and scorned. It has such a bad reputation that no self-respecting citizen would ever join this force. Its members are recruited among all kinds of shady characters, parasites, dishonest individuals, and black marketeers. The term "militiaman" has become an insult in Soviet Russia. When an individual's actions are contrary to accepted standards, he is asked whether he is a human being or a militiaman. Members of the militia are commonly referred to as dirty dogs, swine, gangsters, or "ments" (Russian slang derived from "razmennyy" - meaning corrupt or open to bribery). In spite of the fact that the use of such names may result in arrest, fines, or prison sentences, they cannot be stamped out.
5. The scorn and hatred felt for the militia can be judged from the following incident of which I know. In June 1949, in Moscow, a group of officers who had been called to active duty and were scheduled to leave the following day for Germany, decided to celebrate by going out for dinner and a few drinks as they had already received their pay and travel allowances. About midnight they decided to go home and went to the railroad station to get a taxi. They became indignant and a bit noisy when they could not find one. Two militiamen on a motorcycle immediately turned up and proceeded to arrest the "drunkards" and "restore public order". The officers disarmed the militiamen, beat them up and took their motorcycle. An alarm was given and six more militiamen arrived. The officers also gave them a beating and took their weapons. Then they returned to their barracks. The next morning militia headquarters sent an investigation commission to the barracks to find the culprits. The barracks commander, however, refused to admit them saying: "Your dirty dogs get beatings from everybody. Why should you suspect my officers?"
6. In my opinion militiamen are cowards. They are not accustomed to firearms and are afraid to use them. After dark no militiaman would ever go out alone, because he is afraid of being attacked and beaten. Here is another example of how militiamen treat peaceable people. Riding one evening in a streetcar I was sitting opposite a man in overalls, obviously coming from work. He was tired and sleepy. At the other end of the streetcar there were two militiamen. When the streetcar had reached the last stop everybody but the worker in overalls got off. He was sound asleep. One of the militiamen went to the man, shook him, and exclaimed, "You dirty swine, drunk as a lord! Don't you see that this is the end of the line? Get the hell out of here and fast". With these words he dragged the

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sleepy and bewildered worker out of the car and gave him a kick. The pain brought the man in overalls to his senses and he finally understood what was going on. He turned around and gave the militiaman such a blow on the jaw that he fell to the ground and lay unconscious with his nose bleeding. The man in overalls disappeared in the dark.

7. From their actions, it is apparent that militiamen are not concerned at all with the maintenance of order and the enforcement of law. From the rayon chief down to the last patrolman on his beat, every militiaman is primarily concerned with getting additional income through bribes, extortion, or blackmail. In this field their inventiveness has no limits even when it means taking the last savings from a poor worker. The militiamen do not hesitate to use their almost unlimited authority over people for their own illegal purposes. This is the main reason why the chaotic conditions, marked by universal dishonesty, cannot be eliminated. When a militiaman is informed of a theft or even when he himself witnesses a case of pilferage, he does not arrest the offender in public. He prefers to follow the malefactor to some dark corner and, by threatening him with arrest, get the lion's share of the loot. In this way both men are satisfied; the "ment" got his share, and the thief, although he has been relieved of a good part of his gain, has acquired a powerful protector for future thefts.
8. Each rayon has its militia administration, which is further divided into "uchastki" (precincts) entrusted to individual "uchastkovyy" (patrolman). In the suburbs of Moscow a precinct is comprised of about 100 one or two-family houses. The "uchastkovyy" keeps a close watch on what goes on in each of those houses, not so much to discover anything illegal, as to find out how he can profit. The routine procedure is as follows. Before going home, a worker picks up a bag of shavings from the government carpenter shop where he is employed. The "uchastkovyy" knows where the man works and has been watching him for some time. The worker has hardly arrived home and is ready to use the shavings to start a fire in his stove when the militiaman arrives: "Good evening, citizen, how are you? May I introduce myself, I am the uchastkovyy in charge of the block you are living in...Look here, what have you got in this bag? Shavings? Where did you get them? Oh yes, I know, from the state carpenter shop where you work. Too bad citizen, too bad. In the eyes of the law this is misappropriation of state property, which makes you liable to prosecution under article 162 of the Criminal Law and punishable by two to five years of hard labor. Here is the summons (prepared of course in advance). Will you sign it, please?" The worker tries to explain that this is nonsense, that there is no "misappropriation of state property", that all he took was a few waste shavings to start his fire. The uchastkovyy, however, is only concerned with his duty and does not want to listen to any reasons. "Well, if you refuse to sign the summons" he says, "I'll have to take you down to the precinct; you may present your defense there". The worker realizes that the situation is becoming dangerous. At the precinct he will find more people of the same type and it would cost him much more to pay off there than to slip a bribe to the uchastkovyy. Otherwise the labor camp is a sure bet. Usually the worker decides to settle the matter in a less painful way. The uchastkovyy is invited to come in and to sit down. The housewife is sent to the liquor store for a bottle of vodka. What food there is in the house is brought to the table, and the uchastkovyy is entertained as a guest of honor. He is addressed as "Ivan Ivanovich"

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and nothing is too good for him. Ivan Ivanovich drinks and eats. However he is not yet satisfied, and insists on taking his host to the precinct. Obviously, he wants some money. There are 50 rubles in the house, kept for emergency purposes. They go into the pocket of the uchastkovyy, who, winced and dined and provided with 50 rubles for the next morning's "pick me up" is now in a better mood. "All right", he says, "forget all about it. But don't be so stupid as to take shavings. Get hold of something more valuable that we can share." With this advice, the uchastkovyy leaves, probably to look for his next victim.

9. Every rayon militia administration has an OBS Section (Otdel Bor'by s Gosudarstvennymi Khishcheniyami) charged with the prevention of embezzlement of state property. In common language it is called the "Odna Baba Skazala" (old woman's gossip), an allusion to the way in which this section operates, ie, mainly on the basis of anonymous reports, denunciations, and rumors. The OBS pays special attention to the operation of stores and restaurants, less because these have more opportunities for embezzlement than other establishments, but because they offer easy pickings and a good chance for bribes. It is common practice for Soviet restaurants to serve free drinks and food to OBS representatives; heaven help the proprietor who fails to do so. With slight variations the approach is always the same: "Citizen, we have been informed that your establishment serves diluted beer. We are forced to close the place temporarily and to make a laboratory analysis of your beverages." The owner is well aware of the danger, for the militia can always find fault even if there is no water in the beer, and he prefers to settle the matter amicably. The OBS men are treated by the restaurateur, at government expense, of course, and after receiving a couple of hundred rubles in cash they agree to consider the matter closed. And now in order to cover up his deficit, the proprietor is indeed forced to put water into his beer.
10. Beer halls, bars, and all amusement establishments are favorite haunts of militiamen, since they can always make some extra money in such places. Militiamen know exactly when it is payday in the factories. On that day the workers usually drop into a tavern to forget for a short time their worries and misery. Very soon the place is packed and getting pretty noisy. The "keeper of order" - the militiaman - approaches and while he is still on the doorstep, he is already choosing his victim. In a corner he sees a table where the conversation is especially heated; a man is vehemently trying to explain something to his neighbors. The militiaman closes in on him. "What is your trouble, citizen? Don't you see that you are bothering people? You're drunk. Get up and come along". The man tries in vain to explain that he is not drunk. The militiaman puts his arm on the man's shoulder and the man, of course, tries to move away. This is exactly what the militiaman wants him to do: "Resistance to arrest", he says, which makes the offense worse. The militiaman whistles for help. A few more "keepers of order" come in and "order is restored". The man is handcuffed and taken to jail. He is not drunk but he will spend the night in the "cooler". In the morning, he will have to sign the "misconduct protocol". Charges: drunkenness, violation of public order, and resistance to the state authorities in the performance of their official duty, serious charges which may mean several years of forced labor. One or 200 rubles would help, however. The worker's wife is notified and the money is brought in. The protocol is destroyed and the "criminal" released.

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11. All such tricks, however, are child's play compared with the unscrupulous and arbitrary behaviour of militiamen towards drivers. These poor people are indeed "geese laying golden eggs" for the militia. Special squads called "avtoinspektsiya" /traffic patrols/ are established in every militia administration. These squads post militiamen at every main intersection. Drivers refer to these traffic militiamen as "parrots" (from a scornful expression in Russian: "sits motionless like a parrot turning around his round eyes"). As soon as a driver sees a "parrot" he gets nervous. The "parrot" may stop the car for no apparent reason, by raising his signal flag in the middle of the street and indicating to the driver a spot at the curb where to park his car. The "parrot" comes to the car and barks: "Registration and driver's license, and fast!" The driver wants to know the charge as he is sure he has not violated any traffic regulation. It does not matter, and the answer is known beforehand: "You...sob..., who do you think you are? Driving through the city like mad. See how your car looks. You have not washed it for months! No time, you say? But enough time to get drunk? Even now your car stinks like a distillery." If this happens to be a taxi-cab and the passenger tries to defend the driver, saying that the man has not been drinking anything and has not actually violated any traffic regulation, the usual answer is: "This is none of your business, citizen. You most probably have been drinking together. Let's go to the precinct, you can explain there." If the driver shows no intention of settling the problem peaceably - the standard bribe is 100 rubles - the militiaman impounds the vehicle. This is the worst thing that can happen to a driver. If he goes to his boss without the car, there will be endless investigations, and abuse. How could he explain the loss of the registration certificate and his driver's license? It is better for him to give the "parrot" 100 rubles and to keep the car. When he has received the bribe, the militiaman gets softer: "OK", he says, "get the hell out of here, but watch your step next time." "How about the papers, officer?" asks the driver. "Drop in at the precinct tomorrow, you'll get them there", is the answer. This means another 100 ruble bill for the people at the precinct. There is not a driver in the city who would dare drive a car without a 100 rubles set aside for the "parrot" in case he stops the car.
12. Another profitable business for the militia is passports. As a rule, people in the rural areas are not issued passports. Since residence rights in towns cannot be obtained without a passport, this rule is probably designed to prevent flight from kolkhozes and sovkozhes for the purpose of resettling in towns. But for a few 100 ruble notes, militia officials will issue a passport to any kolkhoz member. Unfortunately, not many kolkhoz members can afford to pay the price.
13. One might wonder why the victims of the militia's arbitrary practices do not complain to higher authorities. The answer is simple: There is no use. The militia precinct chief is himself a former patrolman, and was doing the same thing in his day. He usually refers complaints back to the uchastkovy. The higher officials are beyond the reach of the majority of the people, and everybody is afraid to complain. Since they live in a state not governed by law, the people are well aware of the consequences of such a move.

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